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ABSTRACT

This is the second annual report on the Pittsburgh School District by the Pittsburgh Council on Public Education. The report presents data on the following issues: school environment (school and class size, student and teacher absences, suspensions and assaults, and school satisfaction survey highlights); student achievement (New Standards Exams, communications portfolios, higher level math, grade retention, and dropouts and graduates); budgets (district, Title I, school-based budgets, and annual teacher and principal salaries); student and staff demographics (enrollment by race, where students go to school, special education, and teachers' and principals' race and gender); and facts about the Pittsburgh Council on Public Education. (SM)

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Pittsburgh Council on Public Education

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A Closer Look at Our Schools

2

How well are students learning in our city's public schools?

Where does the Pittsburgh School District's money come from and how is it spent?

How satisfied are parents and students with our schools?

What do *you* think about public education in Pittsburgh?

This is the second annual report on the Pittsburgh School District produced by the Pittsburgh Council on Public Education (PCPE). It is part of PCPE's mission—as an independent voice for quality public education—to keep citizens informed and engaged in our city's public schools. *A Closer Look at Our Schools* presents a picture of the District and some key indicators of its performance in the school year 1998/99, the most recent data overall that is available to us.

Last year's report received an overwhelming response from readers, through returned feedback forms, letters and phone calls. We have incorporated this feedback into this year's report, along with input from Schenley High School students in teacher Connie Weiss's English classes, who reviewed and critiqued the report. Specifically, their suggestions prompted the section on "School environment" that appears on pages 4 and 5. Thank you to everyone who responded.

Many readers—including students—asked why we report many indicators by race and gender. Some stated that we appeared to be blaming groups of students for their lack of success, while others viewed it as offering excuses for the School District. *We report the race and gender of students to raise questions about whether or not everyone has access to high-quality education.* In some cities, for example, drop-out rates, grade retentions (being "held back") and student absenteeism disproportionately involve certain groups. While this does not seem to be the case in Pittsburgh, the data on out-of-school suspensions, identification of students as "gifted" or learning disabled, and satisfactory completion of higher-level high school math courses *do* show differences among groups. In themselves, these data are not answers—they suggest where we might start asking questions.

We trust this report will prompt you to ask your own questions about the schools your children attend, the schools in your neighborhood and the school system as a whole. If you would like to see *all* the numbers we used in compiling this report, call us at 412/434-0890 and we'll mail you a packet of background information. Please complete the enclosed response form so we can produce an even better report next year. We look forward to hearing from you!

A Closer Look at Our Schools

Contents

School environment
School and class sizes
Student and teacher absences
Suspensions and assaults
Satisfaction survey highlights
4 & 5

Student achievement
New Standards Exams
Communications portfolios
Higher-level math
Retention
Drop-outs and graduates
6 & 7

Budgets
District, Title I and school-based
Average teacher/principal salaries
8 & 9

Student/staff demographics
Enrollment by race
Where students go to school
Special education
Teacher/principals' race and gender
10

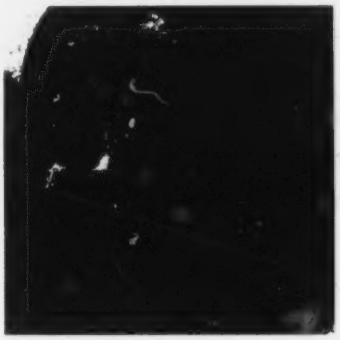
Pittsburgh Council on Public Education
11

Sources
12

Pittsburgh schools

In the 1998/99 school year, the Pittsburgh School District had:

- **39,603 students: 56.4% African-American, 43.6% White/Other races**
- **5,160 employees, including 91 principals (the gifted centers shared a principal), 2,721 teachers**
- **92 schools:**
  - **57 elementary**
    (including 3 K-8, 1 K-7, 1 K-6)
  - **20 middle**
  - **12 high**
  - **3 special**
- **A $409,400,000 budget**
- **9 School Board members**



Integrated schools

In 1987, 59% of the District met "strict racial compliance" guidelines (42%-78% African-American students in each school). By 1997, the percentage had decreased to 52%. In the 1998/99 school year, 48% met these guidelines.

Transportation

About half of the student population was eligible to be transported to school, one-quarter on city buses and three-quarters on yellow school buses.

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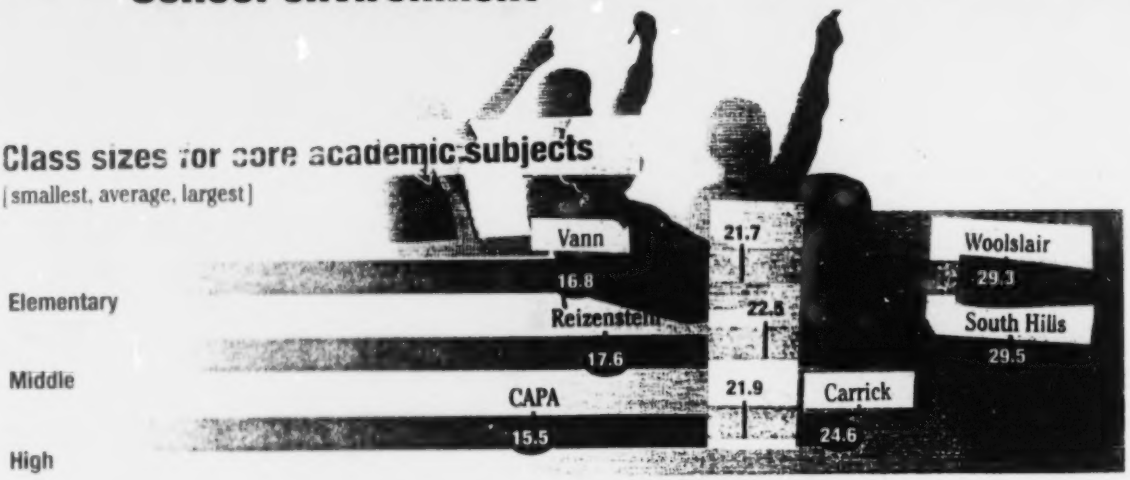
4 A Closer Look at Our Schools

School environment

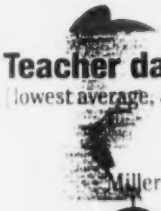
Class sizes for core academic subjects

(smallest, average, largest)



School sizes

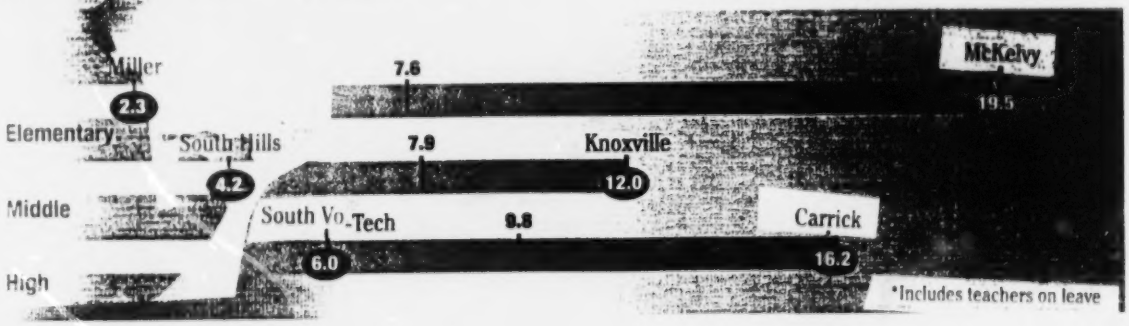
Smallest: **elementary: Bon Air, middle: Arlington, high: CAPA**
Average: **elementary: 356 students, middle: 441 students, high: 931 students**
Largest: **elementary: Carmalt (K-8), middle: Reizenstein, high: Allderdice**



Teacher days absent*

(lowest average, average, highest average)

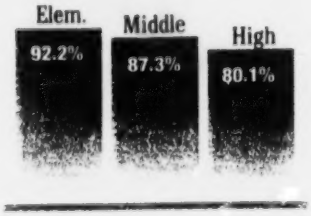
Districtwide, teachers were absent an average of 9½ days, including one day for professional development.



Attendance

87.7% of students systemwide were in school on any given day.

Average student attendance



Student attendance by race** and gender

***Reflects the categories used by the Pittsburgh Public Schools*

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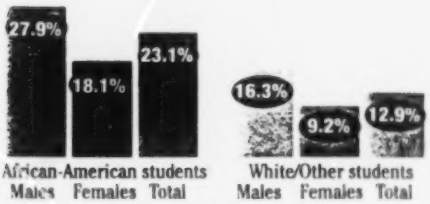
Out-of-school suspensions

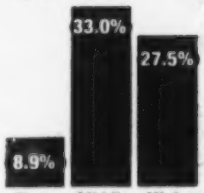
Percent of each group suspended

Suspensions

By race/gender:



By level:



African-American students were suspended at almost twice the rate of White/Other students.

8,473 students were suspended at least once—almost enough to fill half of Mellon Arena.

Total number of suspensions: 20,261

Physical and verbal assaults

Assaults

4,314 students were found guilty of assaulting other students.
702 students were found guilty of assaulting school employees.

Assault is defined as attempting to injure or making a verbal threat, excluding self-defense. Note: two students fighting equals two assaults. Numbers reflect students found guilty—not all accusations of assaults.
Unavailable: The race and gender of students convicted of assaults.

School Satisfaction Survey highlights

The District's School Satisfaction Survey was mailed to parents and administered to students and staff in schools. Completed surveys: 3,432 District employees, 6,530 parents, 12,560 students: all 4th through 7th graders, and 9th and 11th graders taking health class. Highlights presented here do not include special education centers.

Percent satisfied:	Elementary			Middle			High		
	students	parents	staff	students	parents	staff	students	parents	staff
Compared to their parents and staff, middle and high school students were less satisfied with teaching and learning.									
Teaching and learning	83%	80%	80%	65%	72%	78%	49%	63%	68%
Satisfaction with school management declines for most groups after elementary school.									
School management	N/A	77%	75%	66%	67%	75%	57%	55%	61%
A majority of students and parents were satisfied with school safety.									
Safe, drug-free schools	66%	75%	N/A	59%	71%	N/A	50%	54%	N/A

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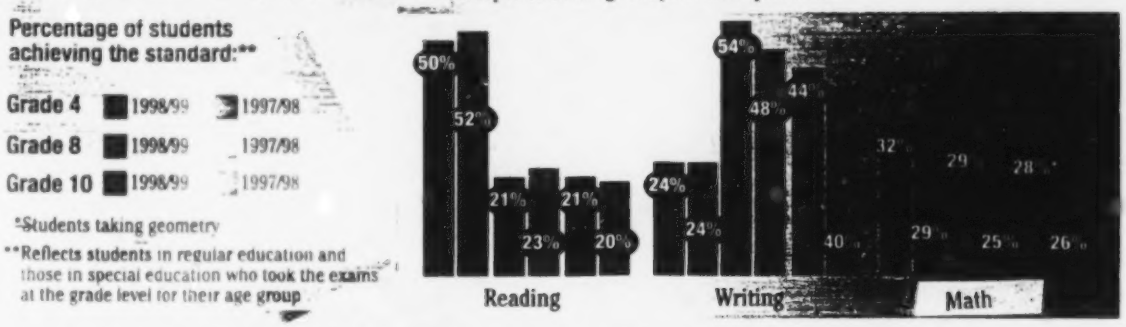
6 A Closer Look at Our Schools

Student achievement

New Standards Reference Exam scores

The New Standards Reference Exams, given at three grade levels, ask students to show what they know—for example, by writing about a topic or solving complex math problems.

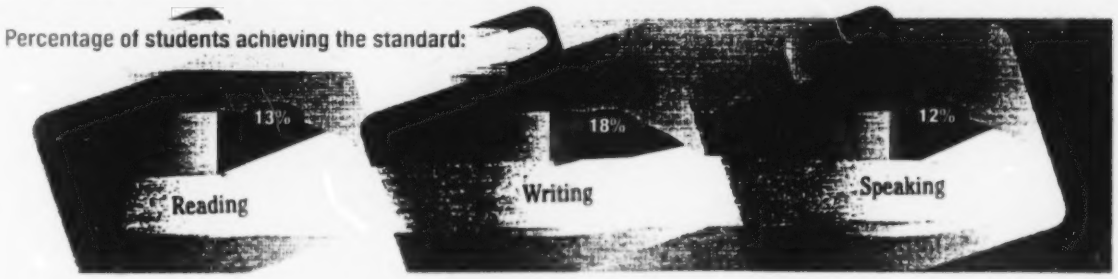


Where students scored well—Math: Computation and use of symbols in arithmetic and algebra, measurements and graphing. Reading/Writing: Basic reading comprehension, writing effectively.

Where students needed improvement—Math: Problem-solving (using concepts to form problems and justify conclusions). Reading/Writing: Reading critically, analyzing and interpreting, using correct English when writing.

Communications portfolios

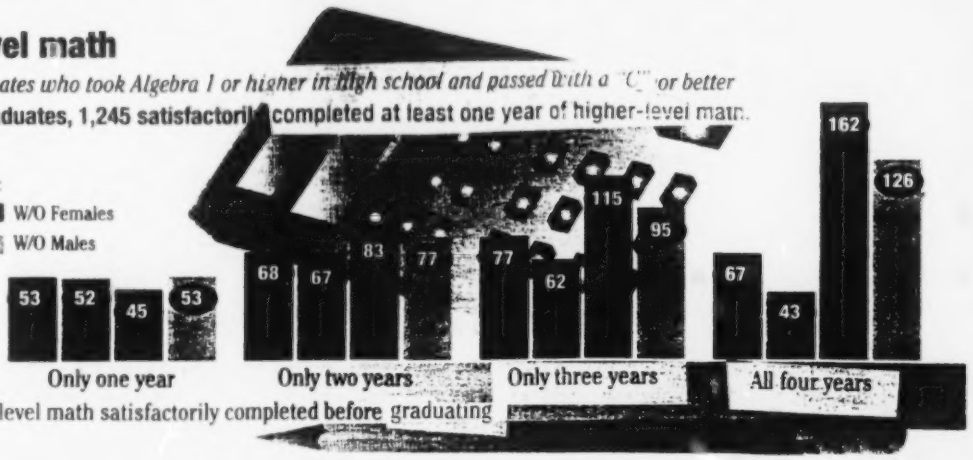
High school students kept portfolios of their work in the areas of reading, writing and speaking. A sample representing all demographic groups was scored.



Higher-level math

Number of graduates who took Algebra 1 or higher in high school and passed with a "C" or better

Out of 2,133 graduates, 1,245 satisfactorily completed at least one year of higher-level math.



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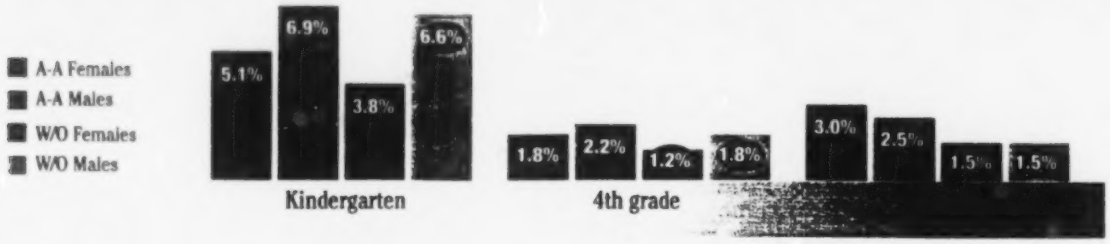
Students "held back" at key grade levels

Few students repeat at these grade levels, with little apparent difference by race or gender.

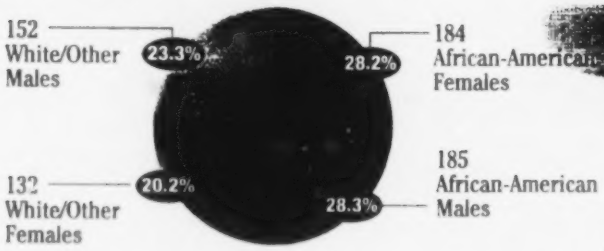
Retention

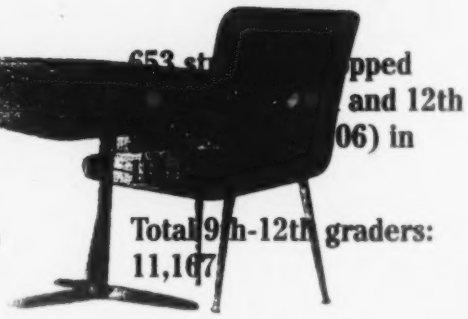
Percentage of each group held back:



High school drop-outs

By race and gender:

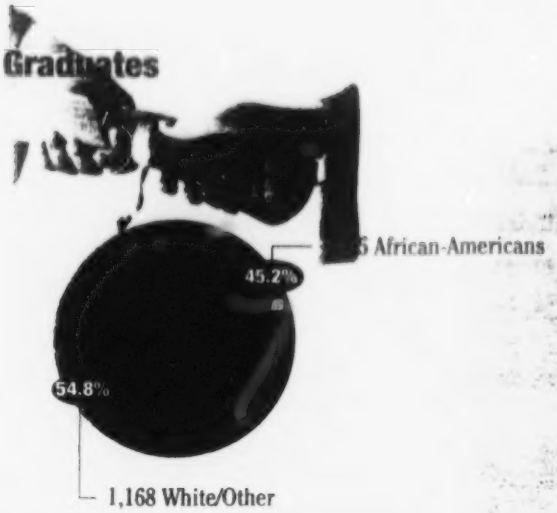




653 st[illegible]pped
[illegible] and 12th
06) in

Total 9th-12th graders:
11,167

Graduates



Graduates

College/university acceptances

Snapshot: Pittsburgh students sent over 1,000 applications to local colleges and universities* and received over 700 acceptances.

*Reflects the

2,133 students graduated from Pittsburgh Public Schools in June 1999.

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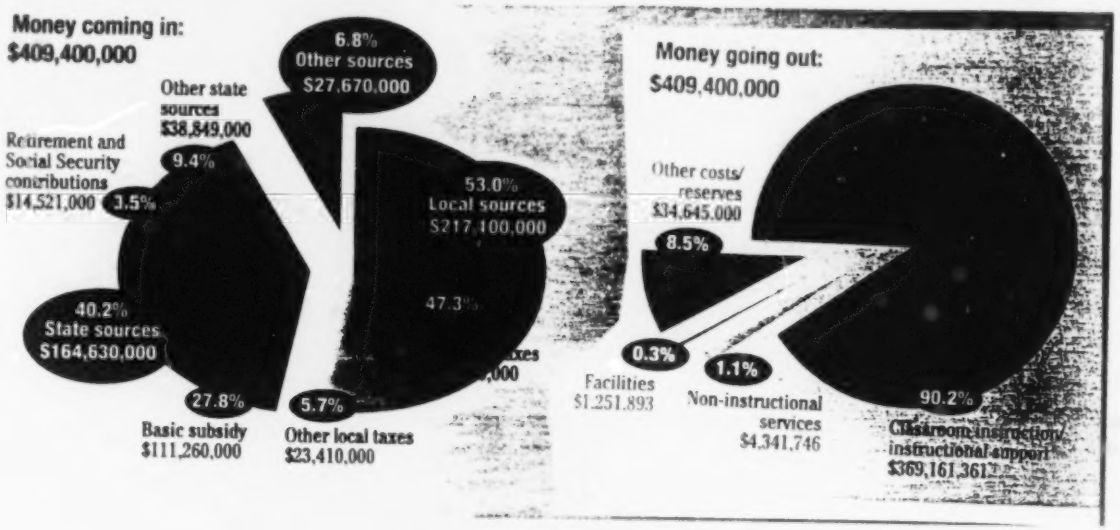
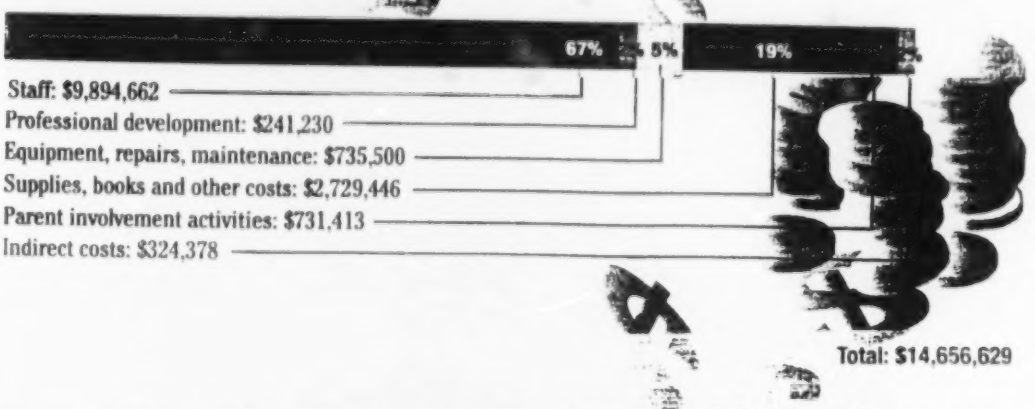
The District's budget



Title I expenditures

Every elementary school and every middle school except Sterrett Classical Academy received federal Title I funds, based on family poverty level.

How Title I funds were spent Districtwide:



Of the $14,656,629 in Title I funds the District received, $1,639,396 were spent centrally (including curriculum costs and parent resource center costs) and $13,017,233 went directly to eligible schools.

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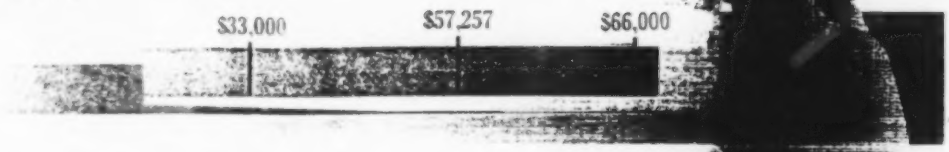
Average teacher salary and range

[smallest, average, largest]



Average principal salary and range

[smallest, average, largest]

School-based budgets

Budgets

The District allocates money to schools for school-based budgets, after subtracting funds for the following:

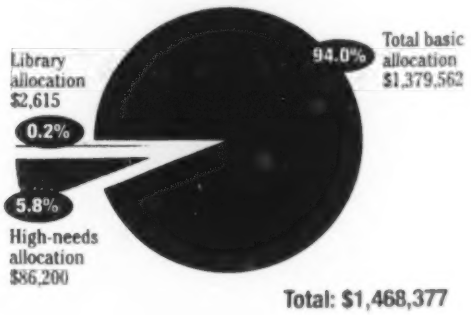
Special education $54,931,193
Facilities $1,251,893
Charter schools $2,910,000
Financial costs/reserves $31,735,000

The remaining $318,571,914 (64%) went into a pool to be distributed to schools according to a per-student formula. Other factors considered along with student enrollment are school size, extra costs for certain magnet schools and vocational programs, school library costs, and the number of "high needs" students, defined as eligible for free/reduced-price lunch and living in single-parent households.

An example of a school budget

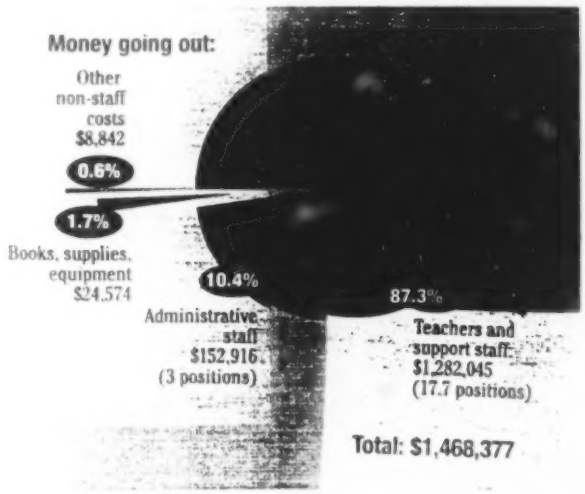
Money coming in:

Enrollment: 317 students
Basic allocation per student
(based on size of pool): $4,351.93



Total: $1,468,377

Money going out:



Total: $1,468,377

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10 A Closer Look at Our Schools

Demographics

Students

39,603 students (77% of children in the city) attended Pittsburgh Public Schools. 78.8% of African-American and 45.2% of White/Other* students were eligible for free/reduced-price lunch.

**Reflects the categories used by the Pittsburgh Public Schools*

Students by race

African-American: 56.4%
White/Other: 43.6%

Students with disabilities

African-American: 8.5%
White/Other: 5.7%

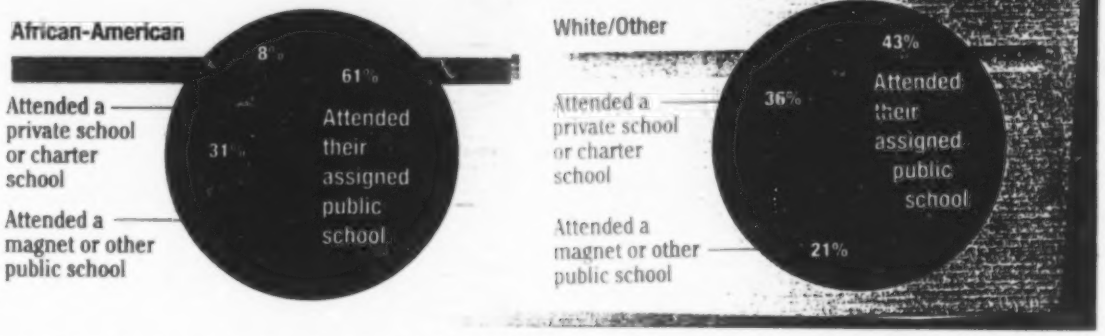
Students identified as gifted

African-American: 2.3%
White/Other: 5.4%

Where students go to school

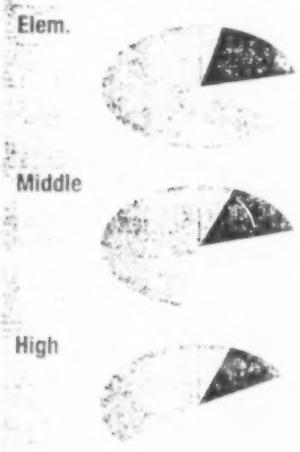
Of all school-aged children:

Enrollment has dropped, but the percentage of city children attending the public schools has increased.



Three charter schools—free, public schools operated independently—opened in Pittsburgh in 1998, enrolling a total of 334 students (average percentage low-income students: 73%). Next year's report will contain more information.

Teachers

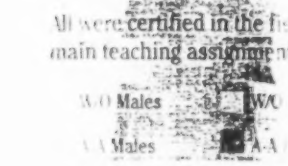


Teachers hired for the 98/99 school year were mainly White/Other females, continuing the trend:

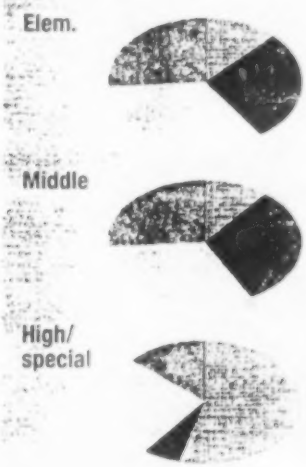
4 African-American males
35 White/Other males
24 African-American females
103 White/Other females

Education:
120 bachelors degree only
41 masters
5 PhDs

All were certified in the field of their main teaching assignment



Principals



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Pittsburgh Council on Public Education

Community champions for children's achievement

OUR MISSION

The Pittsburgh Council on Public Education is an independent, citywide citizen voice working to ensure that every child in Pittsburgh receives the highest quality public education. We provide information on key education issues, and work with parents, students, and community members to assume leadership roles in their schools.

OUR VISION

The Pittsburgh Council on Public Education envisions a united community of parents and citizens who are knowledgeable about public education issues and who together create equitable, accessible, and high quality public schools that produce educated citizens who are confident of their ability to learn and to achieve their highest potential throughout their lives.

OUR CORE BELIEFS

- All children are entitled to free and equal access to quality public education that responds to the diverse needs of individuals and families;
- Every community has assets that can be tapped to support schools and students;
- Parents and community members must be involved in decisions regarding student education and achievement;
- Collaboration must be central in all initiatives that carry forward each public school's mission;
- Grassroots organizing remains a primary vehicle for the engagement of parents and community members in addressing the racial and economic achievement gap;
- Outreach and support efforts must be targeted to parent leaders to energize and empower them in their work;
- Reducing school violence and decreasing bigotry depends on exploring new approaches to building a greater sense of tolerance and community.

OUR INITIATIVES AND ACTIVITIES

BUILDING LEADERSHIP IN SCHOOLS AND COMMUNITIES

- **QUEST—Quality Urban Education through STandards—Initiative:** Partnerships with schools to focus on whole-school reform centered on academic standards. QUEST builds on the success of two previous initiatives: "A Parents' Learning Community for Standards" involving five Hill District elementary schools and "A Common Language for Standards," a six-school parent/teacher pilot promoting better understanding of standards among all groups.
- **High School Graduation Initiative:** A pilot effort designed to support a sample of tenth graders in beginning their graduation projects, with the goal of identifying supports all students will need to meet this state mandate, taking effect with the class of 2003.
- **Innovation in Teaching Grants:** Encouraging innovation through grants to teachers of up to $500 for classroom and school projects. Almost $100,000 has been awarded to date.
- **Gold Star Awards:** Celebrating leadership in public education while improving community awareness and recognition of quality initiatives in the city schools. The inaugural event will be held in April 2001.

PROMOTING COMMUNITY AWARENESS AND CITYWIDE ACCOUNTABILITY

- **Publications:** Publishing our free newspaper *Public Voices for Public Schools* three times a year informs citizens about key education issues and gives them a voice in the debate. The *Bulletin* keeps our members updated quarterly, with coverage of education news from the city, state and nation. Our *ParentVoice Fact Sheets* provide basic information on navigating the school system. And our parents' handbooks on standards outline in plain English what children are expected to know and be able to do at each grade level.
- **Education Policy:** Raising awareness of key education policy issues through collaborations, convenings, and studies on topics such as school governance and equitable school funding.
- **Urban Education Roundtable:** Convening community leaders for quarterly conversations about current issues facing the city schools.
- **Community Forums:** Connecting citizens with policy makers and education leaders at community-based events.

SUPPORTING YOUTH LEADERSHIP

- **YouthPlaces, YouthLeads, YouthReach:** Supporting youth as community leaders through three initiatives. YouthPlaces sites provide afterschool programs and activities for more than 1,000 youth aged 12-18. YouthLeads helps teenagers develop their natural leadership skills for the benefit of their communities and schools. And YouthReach links young people to support and intervention services.

CREATING COMMUNITY LINKS

- **Youth Visions Strategic Alliance:** Uniting PCPE and YouthPlaces with our partners, YouthWorks and The Mentoring Partnership of Southwestern PA, with whom we share office space on Pride Street, Uptown. Our strategic alliance focuses on quality education, safe places for youth, youth employment opportunities, and positive mentoring relationships to nurture our city's greatest resource: our children.

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The Buhl Foundation, Henry C. Frick Educational Fund

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Sources of information

Admissions offices: Carlow College, Carnegie Mellon University, Chatham College, La Roche College, Penn State McKeesport, Penn State New Kensington, Point Park College, University of Pittsburgh

Pennsylvania State Department of Education website (www.pde.psu.edu)

Pittsburgh Public Schools: Office of Budget Development and Management; Office of Federal Programs; Office of Human Resources; Office of Student Services; Office of Technology; Office of Transportation; Unit of Teaching, Learning, and Assessment

Pittsburgh Public Schools website (www.pps.pgh.pa.us)

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